

The gospel of Luke is written with a Gentile or Greek-speaking cultured people in mind. In writing the gospel account Luke focuses upon the role and importance of women and the poor, more than the other three gospels, and relates the most parable teachings of Jesus in his story of who Jesus is, how he was and is in the world, and how that changes even us.

As we read through Luke structured by the narrative lectionary, we draw close to the beginning of Lent (Ash Wednesday 3/1 this year) when we look towards the crucifixion and resurrection. In our reading we turn, with Jesus in the text, to face Jerusalem and the climatic denouement of his work and words. Last week's selection [7:16-35] focused on John the baptizer as a great prophet and his doubt, or mistrust that Jesus was the Messiah he expected. Today we hear of Jesus as a prophet, as the one who can forgive sins, which it was understood only God could do. Next we jump to the Transfiguration, the climactic midpoint of the gospel story where it is God reveals again that Jesus is the holy son, the Messiah to come. Curiously this revelation creates confusion and dissension rather than clarity and unity.

*asked Jesus to eat with him:* The table is one of the most common elements in the gospel of Luke. It's also one of the gospel's most distinctive narrative elements. Meals progress the narrative along, providing the setting for major teaching moments. On at least eight occasions, Jesus can be seen sitting down to meals with others.

So, what role does the table play in the gospel of Luke? Some have suggested that it serves as an organizing structure for the gospel. Whether that is true or not, it is clear that Luke uses these meals as teaching occasions, providing lessons on evangelism, justice and the kingdom. Meals reflect the social values of the culture, revealing the importance of social class, prominence and rank. For this reason, they provide the perfect occasion to illustrate the counter-cultural message of the kingdom of God.

<https://theologicalsweets.wordpress.com/2011/07/24/meals-in-lukes-gospel/>

**sinner:** ἁμαρτωλός [hamartōlos]: meaning "sinning, sinful, depraved, detestable; a person devoted to, or not free from, sin. The word is related to the notion of forfeiting any gain by missing the mark, (of what God approves). Tradition is that this woman was a prostitute.

**alabaster jar of ointment:** Alabaster jars were often made from a precious stone found in Israel. Extremely expensive it resembled the texture of marble and was used to contain ointments, oils and perfume. The thick stone prevented the aroma from escaping and kept the perfume from spoiling. The shape of the jar usually had a long neck and a sealed top. To open the jar, the top had to be broken, which allowed it to be used only once. Some believe that women who owned these jars were usually prostitutes who used the smell to lure in men, or to cover up their own odor. However, several women owned many different types of perfumes. Sources for water were limited, so they used these oils and ointments for hygiene products daily.

The significance of the alabaster jar is an expression of the woman's devotion who is willing to make such a radical and expensive gesture of devotion to Jesus. It could be interpreted as the woman giving up her old sinful life and submitting herself to follow Jesus' teachings. The people who saw this act considered it unfitting. Women during these ages, were not allowed to touch men in such a way.

## SCRIPTURES FOR SUNDAY 2.19.2017

### Luke 7:36-8:3

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>36</sup> One of the Pharisees *asked Jesus to eat with him*, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. <sup>37</sup> And a woman in the city, who was a **sinner**, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an **alabaster jar of ointment**. <sup>38</sup> She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. <sup>39</sup> Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is TOUCHING HIM—that she is a **sinner**." <sup>40</sup> Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "speak." <sup>41</sup> "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed **FIVE HUNDRED DENARI**, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" <sup>43</sup> Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." <sup>44</sup> Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; *you gave me no water for my feet*, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. <sup>45</sup> *You gave me no kiss*, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. <sup>46</sup> You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. <sup>47</sup> Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." <sup>48</sup> Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." <sup>49</sup> But those who were at the

table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"<sup>50</sup> And he said to the woman, "**Your faith has saved you; go in peace.**"

**8** <sup>1</sup>Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, <sup>2</sup>as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, <sup>3</sup>and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

### Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

**\*What strikes you in this passage? How does it interact with what you're living these days, or thinking about?**

**\*This story is one in which Jesus speaks to those with him at table (and the woman) to disrupt the established notions of sinful and righteous, of who was of God and who wasn't. Yet the story is also a meta narrative, addressed to us as the audience of the gospel. We might not have the same exact notions of purity and spiritual uncleanness. But we do have them in our culture, both in and out of the church. Can you identify the characteristics which lead us to define and interpret others as either worthy or unworthy, sinful or right with God? How do those often shape our opinions, interactions and relationships? In your own life are their particular such characteristics which cause you to judge and cut off others? If so, what are they? Why do they shape your vision so strongly? How might you be missing, as the Pharisees in the story are, what God is doing in your midst, or even without your own 'home'?**

**\*Jesus equates spiritual salvation (the forgiveness of sins) with other forms of deliverance (physical from healing, emotional from trauma, social from rejection, economic from stigma). The Hebrew Scriptures asserted that only God can forgive sins. Yet Jesus here says aloud that her sins are forgiven. How does he give her more than spiritual salvation? How you have experienced the salvation in Jesus in your life as multi-faceted, physical, spiritual, emotional, etc.? How might you need Jesus to touch, heal and save you in this season? Spend some time talking with him about this, laying your needs and hopes at his feet, as the woman bathed the feet of Jesus with her tears.**

**TOUCHING HIM:** The notion of unclean, unrighteous or "sinful" and that it is spread contagion-like by association or touch is foreign to our culture. The book of Leviticus lays out in chapters 11 to 15 the distinction God has made between things that are clean (righteous) and unclean (unrighteous, to be avoided) as well as what is required to purify or destroy what is made unclean. This included both things and people. Food was unclean, as well as tools that had touched the dead or unclean foods. Certain physical states (menstruation) and diseases (leprosy) were considered unclean, for which the afflicted person must remove themselves from the camp, the community, the presence of God and the people of God until healed, or returned to normal. This notion was derived primarily from the belief that God is holy and walks in the midst of the people (Deuteronomy 23:14). Here the woman's reputation as a sinner (because of her profession or physical state) shocks the observers. Jesus allows her to touch him, the consequence of which is that he is unclean and should be expelled from the camp, chased from and scorned by the community of the people of God since clearly such a status indicates that Jesus is not able to be in the presence of God.

**FIVE HUNDRED DENARII:** The denarius was the most common coin used in the economy of the Roman Empire. It was the daily wage for a worker. Hence 500 denarii is more than a year's salary.

*you gave me no water for my feet | You gave me no kiss:* In ancient Israel, hospitality was not merely a question of good manners, but a moral institution which grew out of the harsh desert and nomadic existence led by the people of Israel. The biblical customs of welcoming the weary traveler and of receiving the stranger in one's midst was the matrix out of which hospitality and all its tributary aspects developed into a highly esteemed virtue in Jewish tradition. Biblical law specifically sanctified hospitality toward the "stranger" who was to be made particularly welcome "for you were strangers in a strange land" (Lev. 19:34 & Ex. 12:49). It was considered a great mitzvah, an expression of kindness, especially when it was extended to the poor. According to some rabbis, hospitality is, even more important than prayer. Children were taught to be hospitable by instructing them to invite guests to dine when they answered the door. It was customary to greet visitors with a kiss and to wash their feet, which would be quite dirty following a long barefoot journey. So hear the host is not merely rude, but does not follow the commandments of God in his lackadaisical hospitality of Jesus into his home.

**Your faith has saved you; go in peace:** Jesus uses this expression four times in Luke's gospel. It's also found in Luke 8:48 "Jesus said to [the woman who had been bleeding from a menstruation hemorrhage for twelve years], "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." Luke 17:19 "Then [Jesus] said to [the grateful leper], "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."" Luke 18:42 "Jesus said to [the blind beggar near Jericho], "Receive your sight; your faith has saved you."

The healing that these people experienced is expressed, in Greek, by a form of the word *sozo*, which means "to preserve, rescue, save from death, or keep alive." Sometimes, *sozo* refers to spiritual salvation, which, like a physical salvation (or healing) is also linked to a person's faith.